

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

Chair: Peter Burling

Vice Chair: Katherine Hersh

Minutes

February 5, 10:00 am

Manchester–Boston Regional Airport Conference Room

Present: Peter Burling, Katherine Hersh, Kerrie Diers, David Preece, Representative Mary Allen, Mark Brewer, Chris Clement, Mike Izbicki, Nancy Larson, Jay Minkarah, Tim Moore, Kit Morgan, Ron O’Blenis, Mike Tardiff

- I. Call to Order – 10:00 am
- II. Public Input - None
- III. Chair Burling introduced Mike Pillsbury who will be nominated to replace Chris Clement. Mike is looking forward to working with NHRTA
- IV. Status of Grant Application – Chair Burling called this meeting to brief the members on everything that has transpired in the past week. Things are moving swiftly, and we can’t anticipate what will happen in coming week. The list of applicants awarded funding was released last Thursday and a letter was sent to NH DOT informing the Commissioner of the decision not to award the State funding. The letter suggested a deficiency in the application, thus the State was considered to have a ‘non-application’ and was not considered in this round of funding. Chair Burling indicated that our application was complete. On Friday Chair Burling received calls from FRA to provide further details about the deficiency. The FRA stated that a cover sheet was not received that would have signified us as having a completed application. They had adopted a policy about talking to applicants about deficits in their application and could not alert us to the deficiencies in the application. Thus during the last 4 months of discussions and encouragement from FRA they could not notify us that our application would not be considered. They encouraged us to reapply in June as there would be a collaborative approach to applications they would work with us to get it filed. We are unsure about what will happen to rectify the situation. We are hopeful for a meeting next week in Washington DC.

Mike Tardiff asked if the promise of 80-20 match is better than the 50-50 match that we were applying for. Chair Burling stated that we have a promise that they will reopen the application period in mid June for \$50 million but no promise of anything else. We need to continue on the course that we embarked on and pursue the grant we applied for.

Kathy Hersh agreed that we need to continue to pursue the \$1.4 million we applied for. Tim Moore agreed that we need to go forward as we planned. Chair Burling stated that we have to do what we planned to do and continue to work on the State Rail Plan.

David Preece asked if there have been any further discussions about expediting the State Rail Plan. Kit Morgan clarified that since the last meeting, the federal government exempted the requirement of having an updated rail plan for FY10, so we will move forward and the RFP is posted on the website.

Mike Izbicki asked if it would help to get a letter of support for Chair Burling to take to Washington next week. Chair Burling said that it would be ideal for the Governor to come out with strong support and send the DOT Commissioner with a strong message to Washington.

David Preece noted that many of the Manchester Aldermen are in favor of the project.

Tom Irwin added that there was extraordinary support from the Governor and the President and Speaker of the House, asked if it would be good to have the resolution from the Legislature at this time.

Chair Burling stated that we probably would not have time to get that prior to a meeting.

Mike Izbicki would like to start to work on a scope to go forward if we do get the \$1.4 million awarded, and will work on it if the Board desires.

Discussion ensued regarding match and how we will go about completing our obligations. David Preece said that we should proceed as if we are going to get the funds. Kerrie, David, Tim and Mike will get together next week to review the draft economic impact study and strategies moving forward.

Gary Landrio (on the phone) stated that we may find that we have less environmental work to do than we originally anticipated. In August, we developed a categorical exclusion and we will need to file an environmental assessment. But that might satisfy FRA EA requirements.

Chair Burling said that we have pushed this project as far as a volunteer organization can take it in two years. In fact, we exceeded expectations. We need to emphasize that if we get this planning money, but we need to have someone administer this. Mike Izbicki proposed preparing for the potential procurement of consultant support services. It was agreed that Mike will draft a RFP for services that could support the project in multiple stages through implementation.

We need to have this looked at as a major component of our environmental strategy for the state in reducing air pollution, and increasing life span of highways by getting more freight on the rail lines.

Tim Moore suggested that we should look at the Downeaster model of business and what the staff there does. What staff functions do we need to have to have for our service? We should attend the Board of Directors meeting for Downeaster.

James Vayo, Nashua resident, asked if there was any insight into the Surface Transportation Bill currently being considered in Congress. Mike Izbicki said there was a one year extension. James Vayo suggested that Chair Burling meet with the committee in DC that is looking at this.

David Preece asked: What are the next steps? Do you need letters of support? Chair Burling said it would be helpful. We'll wait until we have a date and time for a meeting to start asking for these.

Chair Burling asked: Which states received funding? The Knowledge Corridor through VT, and MA to upgrade service on the Vermonter. Maine received the east to Brunswick line.

Kathy Hersh asked if the New York line to Montreal a problem for us. Tim Moore said it's a different market. We're serving the Boston – Montreal population. We also need to focus more on integrating passenger and freight rail.

Chair Burling noted that the New England states need to continue to work together as a group. He asked what we can do as individuals to foster more regional cooperation. Gary Landrio suggested touching base with David Ewing of the New England Passenger Rail Coalition.

Representative Allen made a motion to adjourn, seconded by David Preece.

Meeting adjourned at 11:25.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerrie Diers, NHRTA Secretary